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14. — *The Cassique of Kiawah: a Colonial Romance.* By WILLIAM GILMORE SIMMS, Esq., Author of "The Yemassee," "The Partisan," etc. New York: Redfield. 1859. pp. 600.

"THE Cassique of Kiawah" is the most recent in the series of novels that Mr. Simms has given to the public, and in artistic skill and vivid narrative is hardly inferior to the best of its predecessors. The series numbers now no less than eighteen; all or nearly all of which we have read, usually as they first appeared, and several of them more than once; and though there are very great differences in their merits, we have read none of them without interest, and most of them with great satisfaction. Indeed, in our own deliberate opinion, since the demise of Cooper there is no one who can be reckoned his superior among American novelists.

The scene of Mr. Simms's novels is laid, uniformly, we believe, at the South, and frequently in South Carolina. The localities are all familiar to him, and his historical researches have informed him of the events, habits, and manners of former times. To singular felicity in the choice of his subjects, Mr. Simms adds many other excellences. He has evidently a thorough mastery of the resources of the English language; yet we do not always approve his selection of words; and, while his sentences are usually well constructed, and often with peculiar skill, they sometimes betray extreme carelessness. In higher qualities, also, we find him irregular; yet we recognize in his writings, in a superlative degree, the power of picturesque description, the imaginative conception of character, the nice delineation of its delicate shades, the ability to deal with subtle and violent passions, and the skilful arrangement and development of intricate plots. The range of the characters he presents to us reaches from the highest to the lowest, including almost every variety; and he seems to be equally at home with them all. They are all genuine flesh and blood; and we become interested in them, as if they had been our friends and neighbors, so natural and living are their movements and speech before us. The graceful and delicate forms of human feeling are treated with entire appropriateness; yet the genius of Mr. Simms leads him rather to sketch the darker and more agitating passions. Revenge, fraternal hatred, and the like, often form the groundwork of his plots, and in most of his works stand out quite prominently on the canvas.

The writings of Mr. Simms are worthy of a more extended notice than we can now give them. We hope to be able, at some time, to present to our readers a careful and adequate review of his merits. We invite them now to the perusal of his novels, with the assurance that

they will find themselves amply compensated by the pleasure they cannot fail to find in it. To those who cannot read them all, we scarcely know how to indicate a proper selection. "Charlemont," "Beauchamp," and "Confession" are, in our judgment, of least interest and least worth. To those who are fond of deep excitement, of rapid shifting of scene and interest, and of the tumultuous and wild in human character, we commend "Richard Hurdis," and "The Scout," or, which is its better name, "The Black Rider of the Congaree." "The Yemassee" is full of life and action, and is a touching tale of Indian treachery and fidelity. The half-dozen designed to illustrate the Revolutionary period at the South, namely, "The Partisan," "Mellichampe," "Katharine Walton," "Woodcraft," "The Foragers," and "Eutaw," should all be read in connection, both as illustrating one another, and because in the successive works we have the same characters, in part, continued and developed. Among those characters, too, there is one on which the author seems to pride himself, as being the creation of his own brain. We mean "Captain Porgy," who, like Cooper's Leatherstocking, or Shakespeare's Falstaff, was thought to be too good to kill off in a single book. We cannot but think the development of this character, on the whole, as awkward as his own protuberant person; though we are very little disposed to quarrel with a hero from whose conversation we have gathered so much philosophy, and with and at whom we have so often laughed.

Those readers who are acquainted with the early history of Carolina, and the famous constitution framed for the infant colony by John Locke, will remember the title "Cassique," — derived from the natives, indeed, but appropriated by him to one of the higher orders of his projected aristocracy. The red men of that region gave the name "Kiawah" to the Ashley River, on which the city of Charleston now stands. The romance before us is named from one of its principal characters, who, by virtue of that office, occupied a large tract of land on the river. His brother, the other leading personage of the tale, is introduced to us as the Captain of the Happy-go-Lucky, a buccaneer somewhat of the Drake and Cavendish school, with perhaps a higher order of sentiment and more refinement than they had. The time of the action is 1682, just when privateers had been declared pirates, and much of the plot turns on this change of public policy. Its main interest, however, arises from the fact that the elder brother had wooed and married the maiden to whom the younger had been betrothed. Under the management of an ambitious and unscrupulous mother, she had been induced to transfer her allegiance, though not her affections, from a lover whom she was taught to believe no

longer living. It will be seen at once that this contrast in the interests of the brothers, and the likeness and unlikeness of their characters which their common blood and different position would generate, must needs furnish a skilful writer with many scenes of the intensest dramatic interest, and that the proper unravelling of such a skein would call for no slight exertion of genius.

We must say, that, in our opinion, Mr. Simms has achieved this difficult task with remarkable success. The proprieties of characters and position are everywhere preserved, and all the violent contrasts that face us at the outset are perfectly harmonized in the consummation. The scene changes from the deck and cabin of the privateer to the swampy and wooded banks of the Ashley; from the low drinking-houses to the fashionable saloons and masquerades of Charleston; from a naval engagement on the coast to an Indian assault and massacre at the barony of Kiawah. Of course a great many subordinate personages are introduced, all of whom are skilfully drawn and effectively handled. The wife of the Cassique, so deeply loved by both the brothers, though not often presented to the reader, makes on him the impression of a saintly purity and loveliness, which is finely contrasted with the hard and unfeeling selfishness of her false and scheming mother. Zulieme, the child-wife of the rover, is totally unlike them both. She is, indeed, the original character of the book, — a pure creation of the author; yet so naturally conceived, and all her peculiarities so ably sustained, that we seem to have known her well already, and can only wonder that we never before met her in the regions of fiction. She has all the truth and affection of a wife, with the simplicity and wondering ignorance and changeful moods of a spoiled, pouting child. The combination is wrought with great skill, and Zulieme is, of his female characters, on the whole, the author's masterpiece. But there is hardly any character introduced that is not well drawn. The Governor of the Colony, timid and covetous, a confederate with the free-trader; the ambitious and treacherous lieutenant, who would supplant his chief; the two sprigs of nobility from England, conceited, yet brave and manly; the female would-be leader of fashionable society, unprincipled and vain; the coarse, vulgar, desperate, murderous pirate; the Indian boy, Iswattee; — all of these are drawn with a fulness and accuracy of delineation that leave little to be desired for the completeness of the picture. With this skill in portraiture is combined a constant onward movement in the action of the piece, and passions vehement and tender are so blended with changing scenes and interests that he who has once been engaged in its perusal will hardly feel disposed to lay the book aside until he has read it to its close.